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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a group counseling program designed to teach secondary students identified with behavior and academic problems to become proactive in the classroom through the use of behavioral techniques. A session-by-session examination of the 10-session program is provided and interventions used by students in the classroom to gain a target teacher's respect are discussed. Although it is suggested that the program be modified to fit different settings, several elements that are essential regardless of setting are enumerated and explained, including enthusiasm, positivism, feedback and clarification, and integrity. Examples of program effectiveness and changes in teacher attitudes and behaviors toward the students involved in the program are given. A 9-week follow-up is mentioned which again indicates the success of the program. (NRB)

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# I'm All Right, Teach!

# You're Screwed Up: Counseling Kids to Change Inappropriate Teacher Behavior

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, Detroit, MI, March 17-20, 1982.

Introduction

Since Ullman and Krasner's (1965) seminal work reporting the use of operant techniques to modify human behavior, procedures to modify classroom behavior of students have been undertaken on a broad scale (Krumboltz and Krumboltz, 1972; Krumboltz and Thorensen, 1969.) Use of behavior modification techniques in the classroom by the teacher have been promoted (Deibert and Harmon, 1972; Buckley and Walker, 1970) and resultant behavior change in students is routinely reported (Keat, 1974a; Patterson, Cobb and Ray, 1972).

Students have modified their own behavior through contracting (Keat, 1974b; Tharp and Wetzel, 1969). Such contracts, though, have been characterized by varying degrees of teacher control (Homme, Csanyi, Gonzales and Rechs, 1970). The thesis has been that the appropriate role for students is to be reactive throughout these procedures: kids are merely passive recipients of teacher attempts to change the students' classroom behavior.

Implementation in training teachers to use behavior techniques has not always been successful (Altman and Linton, 1971). Teachers may have theoretical or ethical biases against the use of behavior management in the classroom (Goldried, 1977; Levine and Fasnacht, 1974). In ability or unwillingness to implement behavior modification approaches to classroom management on the part of such teachers may militate strongly against any resultant positive change in the student's classroom behavior.

In such cases, the school human services professional has a dilemma with which to contend. Given the knowledge that behavioral techniques are effective and that some teachers will not or cannot employ such methods, the question arises as to the utility of teaching behavioral techniques to students to use in modifying the teacher in the classroom setting. Two studies utilizing such approaches have reported encouraging results (Halfacre, Cummins and Thompson, 1974; Gray, Graubarx and Rosenberg, 1974).

The present study investigated the viability of a group counseling format that would teach secondary students identified as behavior and academic problems to become proactive in the classroom by employing behavioral techniques on their teachers. The study specifically sought to examine what effects such a program would have on student grades and student self-concept as perceived by the students' teachers.

Subjects

The students who comprised the counseling group attend a private secondary school whose philosophy is one of rigorous academic preparation for post-secondary education. Compliance by students to this philosophy is expected; tolerance or deviation from this norm is not encouraged by the institution. All group members were white, upper-middle to upper-socio-economic class males. Chronological age ranged from fourteen to seventeen years.

This particular counseling procedure was put to a rigorous statistical regimen, the results of which will be reported elsewhere. It should be sufficient to say that the group participants established significant increases relative to the control group, in terms of self-concept and achievement.

These students were identified as serious institutional risks. As experiemental group members, they were immersed within their targeted teachers' classes along with 4-6 control students. The risk of being identified, as a person undergoing special treatment, was thus minimized.

The progress of this group was as follows:

SESSION 1

Group participants were first asked, "If you could be guaranteed that you could successfully shape more positive behavior toward you by your teacher and not be perceived as a manipulator by either the teacher or your classmates, would you attempt it?" Unanimity was achieved by the students on the feasibility and potential benefits of attempting such a program.

The students were then asked to carefully choose a teacher whose respect they would most like to regain. Particular teachers were then targeted by the group members for behavior change. The need for attention getting and approval seeking in people in general and teachers in particular was discussed. The students were given an assignment of preparing a daily question for their targeted teachers' classes. The question was to clearly and specifically reflect time spent in review of course content and would let teachers know that the students were academically involved with the course.

SESSION 2

Results of the pretest were shared with the group and the purpose and methods of the project were discussed more fully. Baselining was explained, as well as its purpose. It was agreed that smiling would be the behavior most reflective of attention and approval from the teacher. Smiling was thus chosen as the behavior whose frequency would be monitored.

It was agreed that baseline data would begin to be collected the following day and continue for five class days. The students were cautioned against the premature use of intervention (prior to the end of the baseline period), as well as its use in non-targeted classes.

Group members recommitted themselves to preparation of a daily class question for targeted teachers' classes. Following the end of the baseline period, the students would utilize the class question as the first component of teacher reinforcement, in addition to smiling and nodding in class. As a check, questions were submitted to the counselor daily during the first two weeks of the project to verify content and quality.

SESSION 3

The group was encouraged to share any questions or apprehensions concerning the project up to this point in its development. A discussion followed on typical teacher classroom behaviors, and their likely objectives. Students were in agreement that such behavior seemed oriented toward avoiding potentially counterproductive

classroom situations. They concluded then that it might be more useful for the students to encourage positive teacher behaviors in the classroom. Prior discussions of "teachers-as-people" were reviewed.

SESSION 4

Group members were praised at the outset of this session for their faithfullness and responsibility in making their daily frequency reports on teacher smiling behavior. The students were also encouraged to continue to prepare the excellent quality comprehensive discussion questions for classroom use. The group's thoroughness and responsibility was heavily reinforced. Since an important ongoing function of the counseling regimen was maintenance of a high degree of positivism and enthusiasm, the students were encouraged again to commit their best efforts to the task of modifying teacher behavior.

The day's videotape task was explained as a method by which the counselor could monitor the student's ability to recognize and respond to positive teacher behaviors, as well as an overall visual feedback device for the group. A mock, fifteen-minute "class session" was taped. The group was to observe and reinforce positive counselor behaviors by smiling, nodding, and visually attending the counselor.

In processing the tape, it was agreed that what felt like attentive behavior didn't necessarily look like it. The counselor,

when pressed by the group, admitted that while there appeared to be little in the way of negative feedback from the students as observed from the VTR, there was little to hold the counselor's attention, either.

SESSION 5

Interventions employed to this date (smiling, nodding, class questions) were reviewed by the group for effectiveness. Group members were urged to share a positive reaction to these reinforcers by the teachers. At the close of this activity, each student evaluated every other student's participation and attention giving behaviors during the session. Specific instances of improvement were noted and shared.

An additional teacher reinforcer was introduced: the "I understand" statement. The need for honesty in dealing with targeted teachers was re-emphasized at this point, as well as the necessity for backing up the "I understand" statement reinforcer with a concrete statement demonstrating clear understanding of course content. The group was reminded not to endanger the respect they were working so hard to re-establish by using these interventions in transparent or capricious ways.

SESSION 6

In a role playing exercise, each participant took the role of his targeted classroom teacher. In the teacher role, students were to evaluate themselves in terms of perceived changes in the

quality of classroom participation. "Just sitting here thinking about, John really has changed a lot. He's awake, he contributes. . . he kind of makes me feel like a little better teacher. You know, to be able to reach him like that. He's sort of responding to what I'm really trying to do." In this way, students would begin to accept the truth of the impact they were beginning to make on their targeted teachers.

SESSION 7

Besides enthusiasm and commitment, it was also necessary to clarify the students' perceptions of their roles in the project. This session was devoted exclusively to monitoring these perceptions by posing and processing answers to questions such as these: "What exactly are we doing? Why are we doing it? How do we feel about it?"

SESSION 8

A videotape task involved another mock classroom session in which the group could again practice specific attention and approval-giving behaviors. In addition, group members had the opportunity to practice "I understand" statements with a new element added. The new element was to directly link the understanding to the effort of the teacher. "I wasn't sure I would ever get that, but because of how you explained that, I see that you're saying .....".

The students viewed this as well as the previous tape and were able to make specific comments on improvements made by themselves and others. The demonstrated the ability to judge and give

feedback on the apparent integrity of the "I understand because you said...." statements. This statement type was difficult for the group at first, and the faltering efforts to deliver them accurately gave them the look of being an effort to openly manipulate. With the practice afforded by the VTR, students were clearly able to see that these statements needed to be made infrequently, with absolute honesty, and with conviction.

SESSION 9

Group accomplishments in terms of modifying teacher classroom behavior were noted to this point and reviewed. The students were informed that each targeted teacher had inquired of every individual group member by name and was openly curious concerning the "magic" that seemed to be going on. The students were informed that the counselor's response included no specific reference to the group. The counselor reported to the teachers that while a number of students had been working to overcome some difficulties, many were making excellent progress. The counselor thanked the teachers for their feedback.

When asked to make and own feeling responses concerning their teachers' growing interest in the students' gains, students volunteered such statements as, "I like that. I feel good about it. It's easier to put out the effort if you can see it's working for you. That's sort of the whole point, isn't it?"

SESSION 10

The group undertook an evaluation of the project. Questions were asked concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of the training program. Was it worth the effort; what might be done differently; and, what effect might there have been on the students in terms of their perceived ability to control what happened to them?

Students reported extrapolation of the program procedures in that they had become able to deal effectively with significant others outside the classroom. They stated that they had become increasingly aware of the role their behavior played in terms of what happened to them in the context of their inter-relationships with others.

The preceding session-by-session examination of the program is best understood as an example. It represents just one way in which it can be used effectively. Clearly, it can and should be modified in ways that make it acceptable to your own setting.

Recommendations

There are several elements which are basically non-negotiable; that is, they tend to spell the difference between success and failure, regardless of the setting. Briefly, they are these:

1) Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is a component which must be a constant feature of the program. It is essential to provide active, effective and continuous support for the participants. This can be taxing at times, especially those during which other duties may be crowding

you closely, competing for you "emotional time". However, as with nearly any endeavor, if you think something will work, and show it with your attitude, it will invariably succeed. The type of enthusiasm required here takes place inside as well as outside the counselor's office. Indeed, it is likely to occur off the school grounds.

2) Positivism

While this component is clearly a part of enthusiasm, it is an unconditional kind of positivism. "It's working. Look at our frequency charts. See what's happening to us." Don't be reluctant to spend entire sessions on this topic. Use any method imaginable to help the kids demonstrate to themselves that the program is having a positive effect on them; i.e., role-playing, video or audio feedback, and the like.

3) Feedback/Clarification

It is vital that the group maintain constant contact with its goals as well as its methods. Again, entire sessions can and should be devoted to answering such questions as, "What exactly are we doing? How are we doing it? Why are we doing it? Is it working? How? Why? How do you feel about what's happening?"

Don't be amazed to hear these students beginning to make effective use of vocabulary associated with behavior modification techniques. Also, be prepared to answer pressing and insightful questions concerning its theoretical development, as well as potentially creative applications of behavior modification methods.

4) Integrity

It is scarcely possible to overemphasize the role of integrity in the successful implementation of this program. Indeed, it cannot and will not progress beyond the thinking stages without the use of integrity on the part of students as well as counselors in dealing with the teachers. Otherwise, potentially irreparable harm may befall you and your students. This cannot be "let's do a number on the teacher's head." The only appropriate basis for identifying a teacher for behavior change must be the answer to the question, "What teacher are you willing to work very, very hard for, in order to gain his respect?" It is a positive approach.

Keep the goals basic and simple. Our aim is for these kids to regain the beneift of the doubt. It is very likely we will have achieved much more, but guard against expecting more. For the population of kids we are concerning ourselves with, the achievement of that goal alone would probably represent a stunning turn-around. Don't swamp the kids or yourselves with along, complicated series of goals.

The teacher must be dealt with honestly and with integrity by both counselor and group members. In this regard, much time should be spent by group participants in receiving feedback from other members. They need to see how potentially destructive it would be to deliver transparent or un-felt reinforcers.

Summary

Even after a full and clear exploration of the procedure has been given, teachers often find it difficult to believe that they

have changed their attitudes or behaviors toward kids. One teacher slowly shook his head in disbelief after such an explanation, but two days later the student who had targeted him brought me a test on which that teacher had written: "Great job! I don't know what you're doing differently, but keep it up - it's working!"

One of the kids's coaches took the time to come by and say "I might as well tell you: I think all this psychology crap is a lot of witchcraft, but you've made a believer out of me. I don't know what you've done with Jim, but he has turned completely around in his tracks! I'm beginning to feel pretty good about myself as a coach, too."

One student failed to turn in an essay assignment on time, and was given a one-week extension. The teacher's precise words were, "I'll give him the benefit of the doubt. What the heck, he's been working hard!"

Because of a better attitude, another student was invited to participate in extra-credit assignments. Still another was awarded quality points "for outstanding effort."

All students at the school have access to such "breaks", but the project group members had by and large lost the opportunity to take advantage of them, since these projects are offered at the discretion of the teacher. The point is the program kids had regained the ability to be identified as suitable recipients of such extra-credit work.

A nine week follow-up indicates that experimental students are holding their gains academically. Nine week grade reports revealed that no students who went through training have been placed back on academic probation. Conversely, half of the control group are still on academic probation. Teacher comments indicate their attitudes towards the experimental students is still high.

It is our belief that if the appropriate cautions that are given in this paper are adhered to, a viable and highly effective way of achieving academic access can be provided by counselors to students who might otherwise fail.

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